DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 176 757 IR 007 711

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TITLE Developing Countries and Its Information Needs and Supply: A Brief Report of an International Seminar.
PUB DATE Sep 77
NOTE 7p.; Paper prepared for the 1977 IFLA/UNESCO Pre-Session Seminar on Resource Sharing of Libraries in Developing Countries (Antwerp, Belgium, August 30-September 4, 1977); For related documents, see IR 007 707-722

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Business Communication; *Developing Nations; Health Education; *Information Dissemination; *Information Systems; *Public Education; Technology Transfer
IDENTIFIERS *Scientific and Technical Information

ABSTRACT

Brief summaries of the 30 papers presented to the UN/ICSU/COSTED International Seminar on "Technical Information Services for Developing Countries," held in March 1977 at the Indian Institute of Technology, Madras, are provided in this overview of the session. The report concludes with four recommendations made by seminar participants: (1) the establishment of a technical information service which would create databases in special problem areas of local importance, publish and distribute basic science information, and organize mass media material for immediate use; (2) the organization of regional training courses to train information personnel; (3) the development of infrastructure for a science and technology information network; and (4) initation of software development and manufacture in developing countries. (Author/JEG)

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DEVELOPING COUNTRIES AND ITS INFORMATION NEEDS AND SUPPLY

A Brief Report of an International Seminar

by

Prof. T.K.S. Iyengar

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DEVELOPING COUNTRIES AND ITS INFORMATION NEEDS AND SUPPLY

(The UN/ICSU/COSTED International Seminar on 'Technical Information Services for Developing Countries' held in March 1977 - A brief report).

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ABOUT COSTED: The acronym which stands for Committee on Science and Technology in Developing Countries, is a special scientific Committee of the International Council of Scientific Unions. The unique features of the COSTED is that it is a non-governmental body, deriving its funds from UNESCO. Its primarytask is to promote the use of science and technology for solving the problems in developing countries. It has 32 National members, 30 scientific union members and 10 individual scientists representing different countries. In addition to holding routinebusiness meetings, COSTED organizes seminars and discussions on topics of special interest to developing countries. Some of the seminars organized in recent years by COSTED were inAccra, Ghana, Kaula Lumpur, Malaysia, Columbo, Sri Lanka, Nairobi, Kenya, Hyderabad, India, Bangelore, India. In all these seminars, one common feature which emerged was a general feeling among scientists and science educators that the working scientists and educated people in the developing countries were getting alienated from the rural surroundings and the problems of the country. Methods of information dissemination therefore, have to be geared to link educational processes in the discipline of science to the national problems, objectives and goals.

TECHNICAL INFORMATION SERVICES FOR DEVELOPING COUNTRIES:

Introduction: Popularisation of science and effective dissemination of scientific information in the urban areas and more particularly amongst large rural population of the developing countries have an important role to play in the process of their development. The problems confronting the developing countries must be solved on priority basis. It is a commonfeature in many developing countries that amidst ignorance and poverty, there are very advanced scientific institutions with eminence of scientific achievements. This means that the benefits of science and technology have not reached those for whom they are most essential. Developing countries have difficulties in securing, storing and sorting out their needed requirements from the explosion of information. The gap between science as it is practiced now, and the low standard of human life's time in developing countries arises in part because of poor and ineffective science information dissemination. Themethods adopted by the developing countries are not necessarily suitable for this process. Appropriate or alternate technologies based on local materials and local competence have to be found out. The present information systems with them do not provide, in an easily accessible manner, information relevant to technologies for rapid development. The problem of providing the basic human needs in the context of socio-economic impact of any technological advancement needs to be considered and solved carefully. It is

therefore, imperative that information concerning relevant technologies which will help developing countires to solve this problem in the foreseeable future is made available to scientists, technologists, R & D personnel and administrators concerned with the problem.

COSTED organized the seminar on "Technical Information Services for Developing Countries" with this objective at the Indian Institute of Technology, Madras, India, between 3rd and5th March 1977. The Seminar brought together librarians, information scientists, research workers, technologists, educators, management specialists and other groups of experts, exposed to them the above ideas and evoked their suggestions in the light of their experience, Participants included senior librarians, science educators and science policy makers from India, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, and Thailand. About 30 technical papers were presented on different aspects of technical information services by the participants . In view of the substantial work done by the National Technical Information Service (NYIS) of theUnited States in providing information service for developing countries, the NTIS programmes were also presented at the seminar and an on-line data base demonstration was arranged by NTIS as a part of the global information service programme. Dr. William T. Knox, Director, NTIS participated in the seminar. Mr. Frank Post (International Programme Coordinator, NTIS) and Mr. Black (Systems Development Corporation, Santa Monica, California) coordinated the details of the on-line demonstration.

Seminar Programme: The programme commenced with the data-base demonstration for the participants arranged by NTIS at the United States Information Service, Madras. The demonstration included a video-taped programme of how a typical search was carried outon low cost housing, water management and similar topics, connected to the Central Computer in Danta Monica, California which has access to 30 data bases concerning bibliographic details on various subjects.

The Seminar was initiated with a keynote address by Prof. S. Bhagavantam, President, COSTED. Prof. Bhagavantam highlighted the views which emerged from several of COSTED seminars held earlier that popularisation of science and effective dissemination of relevant science information particularly among the large rural population was important. He emphasised that the methods of information dissemination had to be geared to national problems and had to be appropriate to local conditions.

Inaugurating the seminar, Prof. K.T. Chandy, Chairman of the Board of Governors, IIT, Madras, suggested the creation of National Archives to store and evaluate all worthwhile information needed by the people. He urged that there should be free flow of organised technical information from the affluent to the developing countries, voiced his concern to overcome the existing inadequacy of accuract data.

Dr. William T. Knox of the (NTIS), USA said that the services in developing countries were the main programme to which his organisation was devoting attention at the present. He also said that his government was also aware of the need to disseminate adequate scientific information and data to the less developed countries for furthering their growth processes.

Prof. K.A.V. Pandalai, Director, IIT, Madras welcoming the delegates expressed his appreciation of COSTED's gesture in conducting the seminar at the IIT Madras on the important and topical subject of Technical Information Services

Prof. T.K.S. Iyengar, Librarian, Indian Institute of Science, Bamgelore and Chairman of the Seminar Organizing Committee, proposed a vote of thanks to the participants attending the seminar and expressed his appreciation on behalf of the Indian Society for Information Science, Bangalore which was interested in this subject.

PAPERS PRESENTED: In the technical presentations, Prof. T.K.S. Iyengar emphasised the need for more efficient information services after a broad review of the available services and the economic and social factors impeding the effieient utilisation of the existing information services. Prof. Neelameghan of the Documentation Research and Training Centre, Bangalore outlined the working of the United Nations Informations System, emphasising the aspect of technology management. Mr A.K. Das Gupta, Librarian, Administrative Staff College of India, Hyderabad and Mr. V. Seshamani, Director, Bangalore Tool Works, Bangalore emphasised the need for rural, village-level information worker who would act as an intermediary between the libraries or information centres on the one hand and the rural populations on the other.

Prof. S. Sampath, additional General Manager, B.E.L., Bangelore highlighted the importance of computerised information services to meet the challenge of knowledge explosion. He discussed the technological changes and the shape of things to come, the scientific base of information storage and retrieval, importance of the human function, etc. Dr. P.Chandrasekhar, Principal Systems Analyst, Electronics Commission, New Delhi highlighted the development of computerized information systems under the national informatics centre projects. Mr. S.G. Wasani, Managing Director, Macmillan Publishers, New Delhi spoke on the computer aids in printing.

Dr. Jacques Valls, Director of the Regional Library and Documentation Centre of the Asian Institute of Technology, Bangkok, Thailand presented AIT-Information Services, its present status and future developments. Mr. T.S. Rajagopalan, Scientist, Insdoc, Delhi spoke on the plans and projections and development of the National Information Systems on Science and Technology (NISSAT) (India).

Dr. William T. Know, Director NTIS (USA) explained the role of his organization in providing information for developing countries. Prof.H.N. Mahabala, Head, Computer Centre, Madras spoke on Entrepreneur Information Systems

Prof. F.S.C.P. Kalpage of the University of Malaya, Malaysia, spoke on information requirements for agriculture. Dr. S. Radhakrishna, Scientific Secretary, COSTED pointed out the need for providing information on nutritional and health aspects to the mostly illiterate and backward village population. He also pointed out the science journals and abstracting services do not have any chance of reaching the more than 70% illiterate population in the developing countries. He emphasised that information scientists should reorient their methods to meet the vast cross sections of people and attempt to link information services with basic human needs. Mr. M.G. Deshmukh, Documentation Officer, National Institute of Nutrition, Hyderabad spoke on the development of information services in the area of nutrition and projected services to be used and developed.

Prof. P.K. Patil of the University of Mysore, Mysore spoke on the information supply in academic libraries. Mr. A.K.M. Abdun Nur, Librarian Bangladesh Agricultural University, Mymensingh, Bangladesh traced the role of libraries in scienfific and technological study and research.

Mr. K.N. Vasudeva Rao and B.S. Ramananda of CMTI abd HMT, Bangelore spoke on the role of information services for industrial developement.

Mr. G. Bhaktamitran, Librarian, The Indian Institute of Management Bangelore and Mr K.S. Nagarajan of INSDOC Regional Office, Bangelore spoke on the management of handling of scientific and technical information.

Papers by Mrs. Lakshmi Chinnappa, Librarian of the Institute for Research in Reproducrion, Bombay and Mr. H.R. Achyutha Rao, Assistant Librarian Institute of Science, Bangelore dealt on the existing and the need of bio-medical information system and on MEDLARS. (NLM-USA).

Brig. N. Dayal, Controller, Controllerate of Inspection Electronics, Bangelore spoke of the necessity for a well coordinated information service system for the growth of the developing countries. Dr. V.S. Subramanian, Indian Institute of Science, Bangelore spoke on leather and energy information systems.

Dr. B. Bhaskara Rao of Indian Institute of Management and Dr. S. G. Narayanamurthy, Operations Research Group, India spoke on the information requirements for Habitat Development.

Mr Ramani Seshamani, Indian Institute of Science spoke on integrated development, emphasising that the information about underpriviledged section of the society be infused to the educated people to enable them to develop a sense of duty and responsibility, and for an integrated education and development.

Prof. B.S. Kesavan, former Dorector, INSDOC brought out the signifigant points made by each speaker and summed up the salient points of the presentation and discussions.

The active participation of mature scientists and experienced admin-intrators like Prof. Siriwardene, Vice-Chancellor, University of Sri Lanka; Mr. Yogendra Doraswamy, Diplomatic Service, Sri Lanka; Dr. J. Valls, Director Information Services, Asian Institute of Technology, Bangkok; Prof. Kalpage Department of Agriculture, University of Malaya, Malaysia; Dr. Mohinder Singh, Institute of Malaysia and Mr. Abdun Nur, Librarieen Bangla Desh Agricultural Univessity,helped to provide the necessary expertise and experience in the scientific discussions.

Presiding over the concluding session, Prof. S. Bhagavanatam , President, COSTED, said that this seminar which has brought over 100 scientists, librarians, science writers, computer technologists, management experts and enterpreneurs in addition to experts in several other fields, from countries in the Souteast Asian Region, had successfully achieved a major objective of the COSTED and similar international agencies of creating an awareness of the appalling problems of poverty, ill-health and malnutrition amognst the majority of the people, mostly rural, in the developing countries and of the pressing need for orienting science and technology to the solution of basic human needs of food, shelter, clothing education, employment and contentment for these suffering millions. He voiced the hope that the resolutions of the seminar, which included an important recommendation for starting an appropriate technology information service, aimed at the creation of 'data bases in special problem areas of

local importance, the publication and distribution of basic popular science information and the creation of a storehouse of mass media for immediate use', would be implemented and successfully bring out the all-round development of all sections of society in the developing world.

FOLLOWING WERE THE RESOLUTIONS ADOPTED BY THE DEVELOPING COUNTRIES:

1. Recognising the important and urgency of providing relevant, meaningful and adequate information services for effecting social and economic development in developing countries, and realising the need for disseminating science information to all sections of the population including specialists, laymen and non-literate persons alike, this seminar recommends that an "appropriate technology information service" be established with the aim of (A) creating data bases in special problem areas of local importance (B) publishing and distributing basic popular science information and (C) organizing mass media material for immediate use.

2. Recognising the need for training suitable persons for creating information systems in developing countries, this seminar recommends the organization of regional training courses, for training information personnel and suitable programmes for instructing such personnel in effective methods of science information dissemination.

3. Recognising the importance of cooperative programmes this seminar re-emphasises the recommendations made by UNESCO-UNISIST regional seminars on the development of infrastructure for a science and technology information network in the south, south-east and central Asian regions.

4. Recognising the importance of developmental programmes this seminar strongly recommends initiation of software development and manufacture in developing countries in anticipation of hardware involvement in hetwork programmes.